DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 413 147 RC 021 246

AUTHOR Boone, Mike
TITLE Perceived Leadership Practices of Rural Superintendents: Men and Women Who Lead.
PUB DATE 1997-09-00
NOTE 15p.; In: The Many Faces of Rural Education. Proceedings of the Annual NREA Convention (89th, Tucson, AZ, September 24-27, 1997); see RC 021 239.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Attitudes; Administrator Behavior; Elementary Secondary Education; *Leadership Styles; *Rural Schools; School Administration; School Districts; School Surveys; *Sex Differences; Small Schools; *Superintendents; *Supervisory Methods; *Women Administrators
IDENTIFIERS *Texas

ABSTRACT

Conventional wisdom holds that there are gender-based differences in the practices of men and women in leadership positions. Stereotypically, men are seen as using a direct "command and control" style of leadership while women are assumed to be more collegial and collaborative. A review of the literature on differences in male and female leadership styles is followed by a report on a study that explored the issue of gender differences in leadership in rural Texas school districts. The Leadership Practices Inventory was developed to assess administrators' perceptions of their own leadership practices. The instrument was completed by 18 male and 20 female superintendents of small and rural school districts in Texas. Statistically significant differences were found between male and female superintendents in their perceptions of their leadership practices, particularly in the practices of "challenging the process" and "modeling the way." Female superintendents perceived themselves as engaging in both of these leadership behaviors more consistently than male superintendents. No significant differences were found in perceptions of male and female superintendents concerning their leadership practices of inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart. Contains 17 references. (TD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 413 147

Perceived Leadership Practices of Rural Superintendents: Men and Women Who Lead

Mike Boone
Southwest Texas State University
San Marcos, Texas

A Paper Presented to the Research Forum of the
National Rural Education Association
Tucson, Arizona
September 25, 1997

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
J Newlin
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

RC 021240

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Perceived Leadership Practices of Rural Superintendents: Men and Women Who Lead

Mike Boone

Southwest Texas State University

Conventional wisdom holds that there are gender-based differences in the practices of men and women in leadership positions. The issue has been explored from a number of different perspectives, encompassing both sociocultural explanations and structural viewpoints (Bell 1988.) Stereotypically, men are seen as using a direct "command and control" style of leadership while women are assumed to be more collegial and collaborative. While it is certainly true that not all men are directive and controlling, nor all women collegial and collaborative, there has been general consensus by both researchers and practitioners that gender makes an impact in the way one leads an organization. This study explores the issue of gender differences in leadership through an examination of the perceived leadership practices of male and female superintendents of small and rural school districts in Texas. Data for the study was collected using the Leadership Practices Inventory-Self (LPI-Self) developed and refined by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner (1988; 1995.) Analysis of the data may shed some light on the question of gender-based leadership practice.

Review of the Related Literature

The literature on differences in male and female leadership styles is extensive (Adkison, 1981; Ortiz and Marshall, 1988) and tends to support a more open and relationship oriented leadership style for women. For example, Carroll (1989) in a study of women leaders in higher education, noted that women tend to have a more sharing style of leadership than men and to focus more on

"empowerment" and team building activities. Helgeson's The Female Advantage (1990) noted that women tended to work at the same pace and under similar conditions as men, but they reported feeling less controlled by their work situation and therefor suffered less stress. Women also tended to spend more time with people and to emphasize good working relationships with colleagues. Women also maintained a more complex network of relationships both on and off the job and felt less isolated then men. Helgesen also noted that women leaders viewed themselves as more at the center of things than at the top of things as men did. Shakeshaft's Women in Educational Administration (1987) argues that the current leadership paradigm is based on studies of white males and that when female leadership patterns are considered five gender differences in leadership style can be noticed: (1) women administrators emphasize relationships with others in their work; (2) women administrators make teaching and learning a central focus; (3) community building is an essential part of women administrators style; (4) women administrators are constantly aware of their marginal status; and (5) women administrators tend not to maintain a strict separation between their public and private lives. Rosener (1990) in her study of male and female leaders worldwide found two gender specific leadership patterns to exist. The first pattern, which Rosener calls "command and control," appears to be more typical of males in leadership positions. The second pattern, which Rosener calls "interactive," was more typical of female leaders, who were much more likely than males to encourage participation from co-workers and to share power and information with them. However, she tempers her findings with the statement that most of the women she studied were in medium-sized organizations that had recently experienced fast growth and rapid change. As a consequence these organizations were in flux and open to doing things in nontraditional ways. In this settings, Rosener notes, nontraditional types of leadership may be more appropriate and readily accepted than in larger, more established types of organizations. Finally, Eagly and Johnson (1990) performed a meta-analysis of studies on gender and leadership style which revealed a slight tendency of women in organizational settings to be more democratic than males. The researchers declined to argue that this differences was an absolute advantage for

women, noting that expert opinion on leadership effectiveness viewed the organizational environment as more determinative of effective leadership style than gender. In other words, under some circumstances, a democratic approach to leadership would be effective while in other circumstances it might be ineffective.

There are, of course, other researchers whose findings support the view that there are little if any real differences in the leadership styles of men and women. For example, Gabler (1987) argues that successful women school executives do not necessarily lead in ways that differ substantially from successful men. On a somewhat broader scope, Donnell and Hall (1980) studied the ways nearly 2,000 male and female managers performed on specifically defined aspects of the managerial process searching for confirmation of gender-based differences. Their study was based on two assumptions: (1) for any study of gender differences in leadership to be valid "the comparative dimensions should relate to and be valid indicators of managerial competence, " and (2) " individuals studied should be truly comparable," that is, hold the same type of job or occupy the same organizational level. (pg. 62.) Donnell and Hall concluded:

> ...And after all is said and done, we have detected a total of two overall differences between male and female managers. One of these, involving managerial work motivation, favors females: Their work motivation profiles are more "achieving" than those of their male counterparts. The other difference, pertaining to interpersonal competence, favors the male managers: They are more open and candid with their colleagues than are females. Add to these the more titillating than significant anomalies of differing back-up style preferences and we are left with one conclusion: *Women, in general, do not differ from men, in general, in the ways in which they administer the management process* (italics in original) (Pg. 76.)

At this point it would appear that the issue of gender-based differences in leadership is still open to discussion.

Research Methodology

Theoretical orientation. This study is grounded in the research on leadership practice done by Kouzes and Posner (1995.) These researchers conceive of leadership as a set of observable and learned practices which are gender-neutral and which form the basis of a relationship between leader and follower. Much of this relationship rests on the credibility of the leader and his or her ability to motivate others to want to strive toward achieving shared aspirations. Kouzes and Posner see a clear distinction between mobilizing others to do something and mobilizing others to want to do something. Anyone in a position of authority can compel compliance from others by reason of the power they wield. But the leader motivates others because of the credibility s/he possesses. This credibility is sustained by what the leader does--by challenging, inspiring, enabling, modeling and encouraging. These behaviors are the essence of leadership.

Using Kouzes and Posner's research as a basis, this study examines the perceived leadership practices of male and female superintendents of small and rural school districts in Texas. The intent of the study is to test the hypothesis that *there are no significant difference in the way male and female superintendents of small, rural school districts perceive their own leadership practices.* Application of appropriate statistical procedures will enable the researcher to accept or reject the null hypothesis.

The Leadership Practices Inventory The Leadership Practices Inventory was developed using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The conceptual framework for the inventory grew out of an extensive series of in-depth interviews and written case studies which explored the

"personal best" in leadership practices of mid- and senior-level managers in a wide variety of public and private institutions (Kouzes and Posner, 1988; 1995.) The LPI explores five key leadership practices. These are: *challenging the process; inspiring a shared vision; enabling others to act; modeling the way;* and *encouraging the heart.* Each of these key leadership practices are focused on distinct aspects of leadership . For example, *challenging the process* explores the extent to which the leader searches for opportunities to change the way the organization functions and encourages experimentation and risk taking. *Inspiring a shared vision* involves the leader in joint construction of a common vision and in enlisting the support of others for achieving that vision. The leadership practice of *enabling others to act* explores the extent to which a leader fosters collaboration in the organization and strengthens others as they participate in collaborative efforts. *Modeling the way* probes how the leader sets a positive example for others in the organization and plans small wins in the change process. Finally, the practice of *encouraging the heart* assesses the leader's recognition of the contribution of others to the well-being of the organization and the ways in which s/he celebrates the accomplishments of the work group. Respondents to the inventory indicate whether they engage in the described behavior seldom or rarely; once in a while; sometimes; fairly often; or very frequently. To date, the LPI has been administered to managers and nonmanagers in a variety of public and private organizations and across demographic and national backgrounds.

The complete Leadership Practices Inventory consists of two instruments, the LPI-Self and the LPI-Observer. The LPI-Self is a self-assessment instrument while the LPI-Observer measures other's perceptions of the leader's practices. Internal reliability measures for the LPI are strong, ranging from .81 to .91. Internal reliability for the LPI-Self range from .71 to .85 and for the LPI-Observer from .82 and .92. Although designed as a part of a feedback assessment activity involving the leader and his or her co-workers, the LPI-Self can justifiably be used as a self-reporting device. Mean scores for the LPI-Self and the LPI-Observer differ by only plus or minus

1.2 points (Wesson and Grady, 1994; Kouzes and Posner, 1995) thus making this a reliable measure of leadership practice.

Procedures. During the 1996-97 school year, Texas had ninety-four female superintendents, out of a total of 1048 superintendents of schools. Of these ninety-four female administrators, thirty-seven led districts which could be classified as small and/or rural. For purposes of the study, "rural" is defined by the geographic location of the school district and the population of the county in which the district is situated. A school district is considered to be small if it enrolls fewer than 2000 students. Letters inviting participation in the study were sent to each of these thirty-seven women superintendents. Twenty-three female superintendents indicated a willingness to participate in the study and twenty eventually returned completed copies of the LPI-Self. The sample of female superintendents was matched with a like number of male superintendents, using the same selection criteria. Letters inviting participation in the study were also sent to the male superintendents. Twenty-two males agreed to participate and of these eighteen returned completed LPI-Self surveys. In all, thirty-eight completed copies of the LPI-Self were returned for analysis.

Analysis of Data. Mean scores for the instrument as a whole and for each subscale were compared using the t-test (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997) with a probability level for rejection of the null hypothesis set at .01. This operation revealed a significant difference in response between male and female superintendents for the instrument as a whole and for two of the five subscales. No significant differences in male/female responses were found on the other three subscales. Table I displays the means and differences in the means for male and female respondents to the LPI-Self while Table 2 contains T scores, degree of freedom and p level for the pooled variances of the means for male and female respondents.

Table 1

Intergroup Means for LPI-Self Total Instrument and Scales

Scale	Female	Male	Difference
Total	123.450	114.722	**8.728**
Challenge	24.550	21.389	**3.161**
Inspiring	23.350	21.944	1.406
Enabling	26.400	26.222	0.178
Modeling	24.950	22.778	**2.172**
Encouraging	24.200	22.389	1.811

Table 2

Pooled Variances for LPI-Self Total Instrument and Subscales

Scale	T	DF	p
Total	2.807	36	**.0080**
Challenge	3.170	36	**.0031**
Inspiring	1.439	36	.1589
Enabling	0.319	36	.7516
Modeling	3.058	36	**.0042**
Encouraging	1.759	36	.0870

Significant differences (p=.01) in the responses of male and female superintendents to the LPI-Self appear for the total instrument and for two of the five subscales, *challenging the process* and *modeling the way*. No differences between the perceived leadership practices of the genders were

found for *inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act* , or *encouraging the heart.* But what do these numbers reveal about actual leadership practice? First of all, female superintendents in the sample perceive themselves as engaging in all of the leadership practices described in the LPI-Self either " very frequently," or "almost always" more consistently than did the male superintendents. Mean scores for the total LPI-Self are significant here. The mean score for all female respondents to the instrument was 123.450 while the mean score for male superintendents responding was 114.722. An examination of the specific behaviors included in the subscales may also prove enlightening. First, let us turn to those subscales where significant differences in perceived leadership behaviors were found. The leadership practice of *challenging the process* focuses attention on the leader's search for opportunities to do things differently in the organization and his or her willingness to experiment and to take risks. The specific leadership behaviors in this subscale include such things as seeking out challenging opportunities that test the leaders skills and abilities; keeping up-to-date on the most recent developments affecting the organization; challenging the traditional way things are done at work; looking for innovative ways to improve organizational operations; a willingness to learn from failures; and experimenting and taking risks. The mean scores of responses on this subscale indicates that women superintendents perceived themselves employing these leadership behaviors more frequently than did the male superintendents.

The second area for perceived differences lay in the leadership practice *modeling the way*. This subscale of behaviors describe the leader's ability to set an example for members of the organization and to plan small wins. The specific behaviors described here include such things as having a clear grasp of one's own leadership philosophy; breaking projects down into manageable steps, thus increasing the probability of success; spending time and energy making sure that organizational members adhere to agreed upon values; communicating to others one's own belief and value system; demonstrating behaviors consistent with the values espoused; and setting clear

goals and benchmarks for work projects. Here again, female superintendents perceived themselves as engaging in these leadership behaviors more consistently than male superintendents.

In three of the subscales of the instrument, male and female superintendents exhibited little or no difference in the perception of their own leadership behaviors. These subscales are *inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act,* and *encouraging the heart. Inspiring a shared vision* measures the leader's perception of his or her ability to envision the future and to enlist the support of others in achieving that vision. Specifically, this subscale measures the extent to which the leader describes to others the type of future that could be jointly created; appeals to others to share the vision of the future as their own; communicates a positive and hopeful outlook for the future of the organization; convinces others that their own long-term future vision can best be realized by sharing in a common vision; forecasts what the future might look like; and is excited and enthusiastic about future possibilities. Male and female superintendents tended to be very much alike in perceptions of this key leadership practice.

Enabling others to act measures the leaders ability to empower others and to foster collaborative efforts. Here again, male and female superintendents shared a consistent perception of their own activities. Specific behaviors in this subscale include involving others in planning; treating others with dignity and respect; permitting wide discretion to others in decision making; developing cooperative realtionships with co-workers; establishing an atmosphere of mutual trust; and inspiring a sense of ownership in others for the work projects in which they engage. Finally in *encouraging the heart* the leader celebrates accomplishments; recognizes the contributions of others to the success of work projects; praises others for work well done; gives appreciation and support to team efforts; finds ways to celebrate accomplishments; and informs others in the organization about the good work done by his or her work group. Male and female superintendents were once again in general alignment in their perceptions of their own behaviors in this subscale.

Implications for Further Research and Conclusion. This study found that statistically significant differences do exist between male and female superintendents of small rural school districts in the ways in which leadership practices are perceived, particularly in the leadership practices of *challenging the process* and *modeling the way*. However, no significant differences were found in the way these same male and female superintendents perceived their leadership practices in *inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act* , and *encouraging the heart*.. Several implications for further research are embedded in the results of this data. In the first place, how might the differences in leadership practices between male and female superintendents on two subscales of the instrument but general agreement on three others be explained? Are women more adept at finding innovative ways of doing things and in providing role models than men or were there contextual factors present within the environment of these particular superintendents which called for a different emphasis leadership practice? The direction and extent of these differences needs to be explored. Further, since the sample of this study was circumscribed by definition, would administration of the instrument to a larger sample of male and female superintendents have the same results or did the small sample negatively impact the results? Finally, while the differences in perceptions of male and female superintendents may be statistically significant, what relevance do these results have for the actual practice of current superintendents or for the preparation of future superintendents? If research of this type is to be justified it must have a practical application to the field. How can these findings be applied to enhance the practice of all superintendents?

The overall results of this study are consistent with other researchers who found gender differences in certain perceived leadership practices using the LSI (Riley, 1991; Dunson, 1992; & Long, 1994.) Where this study differs is not in the discovery of differences in perceived leadership practices between males and females, but in the specific subscales in which those differences occurred. Insufficient data exists at this point to explain this discrepancy, but it may warrant

further exploration. What the data does support is the firm conclusion that male and female rural school superintendents hold differing perceptions of some, but not all, of their own leadership practices.

References

Adkinson, J. (1981.) Women in administration: A review of the research. Review of Educational Research, 5(3), 311-343.

Bell, C. S. (1988.) Organizational influences on women's experience in the superintendency. Peabody Journal of Education, 65(4), pgs. 31-59.

Carroll, S. (1989, February). Cited strategies for women in academe. Academic Leadership, 5 (2).

Donnell, S. M. & Hall, J. (1980, Spring). Men and women as managers: A significant case of no significant difference. Organizational Dynamics 8 (4).

Dunson, C. L. (1992.) "Relations between sex role orientations, interpersonal relations orientation, leadership style preferences, and fear of success in university faculty." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Missouri, Kansas City.

Eagly, A. H. & Johnson, B. T. (1990). Gender and leadership style: A meta-analysis. Psychological Bulletin 108 (2).

Gabler, J. E. (1987) Leadership: a woman's view. In L. T. Shieve & M. B. Shoenheit (Eds.), Leadership: Examining the elusive. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Helgesen, S. (1990.) The female advantage: Women's ways of leadership. New York: Doubleday Currency.

Kouzes, J. M. & Posner, B. Z. (1995). The leadership challenge. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Long, J. (1994.) "Leadership practices of elementary principals and parental involvement in their schools." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Eastern Michigan University.

McMillan, J. H. and Schumacher, S. (1997.) Research in education: A conceptual approach. New York: Longman.

Ortiz, F. I. & Marshall, C. (1988.) Women in educational administration. In N. Boylan (Ed.) Review of research in educational administration. New York: Longman.

Posner, B. Z. and Kouzes, J. M. (1988). Development and validation of the leadership practices inventory, Educational and Psychological Measurement 48 (2).

Rosener, J. (1990.) Ways women lead. Harvard Business Review (November-December), pgs. 119-125.

Riley, C. H. (1991). Superintendents' leadership behaviors which promote the instructional leadership of principals. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of La Verne.

Shakeshaft, C. (1987). Women in educational administration. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Wesson, L. H. and Grady, M. L. (1994). National study of women superintendents using the leadership practices inventory. A paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, April 4, 1994. ERIC Document Reproduction No. ED 376 593.